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RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY 0665
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000558

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 12/15: GCC AND THE FUTURE; HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES; HIGH COMMISSION SECURITY JUDGMENTS

REF: SUVA 557

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

1. (C) PM Qarase, RFMF Commander Bainimarama, and Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) Chair Bokini remain headline players for how Fiji's political future will unfold. There is no obvious clarity. Reports of troubling RFMF intimidation tactics continue to flow in. We offered support to human rights defenders via a letter to newspapers. Fiji's Human Rights Commissioner Shameem is drawing fire from NGOs for perceived bias toward the military. The Australian High Commission has been lowering its security profile a bit. The UK may forbid people with RFMF links from applying to become British soldiers. End summary.

Qarase, Bainimarama, the GCC, and the future

2. (U) PM Qarase told a radio interviewer today that it is looking "more and more difficult" to get back into power, but he still sees a possibility for the RFMF to withdraw and let the legitimate government return. It remains unclear whether the Great Council of Chiefs will meet next week. Commodore Bainimarama threatened publicly today that "if the Great Council decides to hold off appointing a president, this transitional regime can rule for up to 50 years." He added that if the GCC wants to re-install Qarase, then it should expect "another thing coming." GCC Chair Bokini told an interviewer he expects the meeting to take place.

Embassy supports human rights v. RFMF intimidation

3. (C) The Ambassador submitted a letter to Suva's three newspapers, celebrating International Human Rights Day and supporting efforts by media and NGOs to protect human rights in Fiji. On that front, when the RFMF brought in Attorney General Bale for interrogation, Col. Driti reportedly put a pistol to Bale's head. When the RFMF brought in Post editor Wolfgramm yesterday (ref), LtCol. Mara reportedly hit the journalist across the face with a newspaper while announcing he would be deported. The Australian HighComm tells us the deportation has been delayed while Fiji authorities sort out if a person born in Fiji, though now a citizen elsewhere, can legally be expelled.

Fiji HRC's Shameem drawing fire

4. (C) The NGO community is becoming very displeased with the Chair of the Fiji Human Rights Commission (HRC), Dr. Shaista Shameem, sister of High Court Judge Nazhat Shameem. Rumors

in Suva are spreading that both sisters have unsavory links with the RFMF. Ever since the coup, Shaista has been unnaturally quiet, while evidence has mounted of RFMF intimidation efforts. The only time she has gone public was to announce that the HRC would help RFMF lawyers defend against their possible expulsion from the Fiji Law Society for having allegedly advised Bainimarama he could undertake a coup. NGOs figured the RFMF lawyers could take care of themselves, whereas many victims in Fiji really need HRC assistance. We hear that when the head of a prominent NGO visited HRC offices earlier this week seeking an explanation, Shaista said she has been engaged in "confidential discussions" with the RFMF that she could not reveal.

Aussie HighComm to-ing and fro-ing

¶5. (C) The Australian High Commission told us that, effective tomorrow, dependents will be allowed to return to Suva. Most plan to, in order to celebrate Christmas in Fiji. We hear the three Australian Navy ships that have hovered off Fiji are taking a break. We have noticed that most of the extra security personnel who were in Suva for weeks, planning for contingencies, have departed. NZ High Commission dependents are not yet being allowed to return. As previously reported, the UK High Commission went on authorized departure in November, but no dependents left Fiji.

UK military recruiting in Fiji on temporary hold

¶6. (C) The UK will announce next week that the scheduled visit of a recruiting team from the British Army, scheduled for mid-January, will be delayed by at least one month. This visit was to have finalized recruitment of about 200

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soldiers into the British army. The UK High Commission would like to announce that, in future recruitments, no RFMF or former RFMF soldiers would be eligible. This is mostly symbolic. It appears no RFMF soldiers have been selected in the three years of the program. London has yet to decide the issue.
DINGER